

including the Heritage Foundation, the Brookings Institution, the Concord Coalition and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget also have embraced the SAFE Commission.

Make no mistake. This could well be the hardest economic issue our Nation will ever be faced with, but we cannot afford to wait.

I will end with a statement by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a Lutheran pastor who stood up to the Nazis and was executed, hung in Flossenbergs Prison when the artillery was coming, the western ally artillery was coming to liberate Germany. He was hung by the Nazis. Here's what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, and I think he was exactly right when he said, "The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children."

Will this Congress, will this 111th Congress meet the Dietrich Bonhoeffer test? I don't know. But I'm going to do everything I can, offer amendments on the floor, amendments in committee, to see that this Congress is forced to deal with this issue so that we can honestly say to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we have tried and done whereby we, however, are a moral society, and we have left a good environment and society for our children.

[From the *The Washington Post*, Jan. 8, 2009]  
YEARS TO COME

"FISCAL SPACE" is an economist's term for a country's capacity to borrow and spend its way out of recession without risking exorbitant interest rates and inflation later on. Generally speaking, the more public debt a country already has as a share of its economy, the less new debt it can take on.

As President-elect Barack Obama and Congress contemplate a fiscal stimulus package that could total hundreds of billions of dollars, they still have some fiscal space to work with. At \$6.3 trillion, the publicly held national debt is about 45 percent of the \$14 trillion economy—not much above the post-World War II average debt-to-GDP ratio of 43 percent. But the space is shrinking rapidly. According to new figures from the Congressional Budget Office, federal debt is rising at the fastest rate since World War II. It is estimated at \$1.2 trillion in fiscal 2009, or 8 percent of gross domestic product. This stunning number reflects both the direct effect of the recession on tax revenue and spending and the high cost of measures taken to combat the downturn, such as the financial sector bailout. And it is likely to be matched or exceeded when the Obama stimulus plan kicks in.

Mr. Obama was just leveling with the American people when he noted yesterday that the country faces "trillion-dollar deficits for years to come" unless policymakers "make a change in the way that Washington does business." The question, of course, is how to change. Though Mr. Obama's appointment of an efficiency-minded chief performance officer sent a useful signal, the real answers are legislative. The stimulus package must not bloat the government's permanent financial commitments. According to a recently published International Monetary Fund paper, appropriate measures include increased transfers or temporary tax cuts to consumers at the bottom and middle of the income scale; aid to state and local governments; and repairs and improvements (especially energy-saving ones) to existing infra-

structure. The IMF recommends against increasing the federal payroll, cutting corporate tax rates or letting companies deduct their recent losses against past years' profits. The stimulus plan should include a plan for offsetting spending cuts and revenue increases once the economy recovers.

Over the long run, investors will finance the U.S. government at reasonable rates only if it tackles its huge unfunded health-care and pension commitments. Unchecked, the cost of providing Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid to 77 million retiring baby boomers could push the debt-to-GDP ratio up to nearly 300 percent by 2055, according to a December 2007 CBO report.

Ideally, Congress would make the necessary hard choices through the normal legislative process. Its repeated failure to do so, however, may necessitate a commission to recommend reforms for the House and Senate to accept or reject. Reps. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.) and Frank R. Wolf (R-Va.) and Sens. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) have offered proposals for such a panel. Hard as it is, jumpstarting the U.S. economy will be easy compared with securing its financial future. But Mr. Obama and the Congress must do both.

#### HONORING THE SACRIFICE OF STAFF SERGEANT SOLOMON T. SAM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor a young man beloved by his family, friends and his country, Staff Sergeant Solomon T. Sam of the United States Army, who was taken from us on December 4, 2008, in Mosul, Iraq.

Staff Sergeant Sam devoted nearly a decade to this country. He enlisted in the U.S. Armed Services in October 2000, and redeployed to Iraq in November of 2008, serving with the 523rd Engineer Company, 84th Engineer Battalion, 25th Infantry Division out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

The commitment for this country is something we can all be proud of. Solomon will be remembered as a soldier, a son, a husband and a father. His three young children will grow up knowing their dad was a hero.

Madam Speaker, Staff Sergeant Sam is a true American hero who made the ultimate sacrifice for his country. I ask my colleagues to keep his family and friends in their thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time.

#### THE FORGOTTEN WAR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 18, 2007, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KIRK. Madam Speaker, with a President to inaugurate and a troubled economy we can overlook the sacrifice of our troops in Afghanistan. This conflict, overshadowed by Iraq, is often called the Forgotten War.

Last month I became the first Member of the House to serve in an Immi-

nent Danger Area since 1942. Now, Members of this House have served in all of America's wars, from the Revolution through World War II. But the Defense Department's policy of 1943 blocked reservist Congressmen from serving in Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Kosovo or Iraq. Senator and Colonel LINDSAY GRAHAM broke through this barrier 2 years ago, and I became the first Member of this House to also serve since World War II.

While our country has moved from a draftee military to an all-volunteer force, I think it's still important for as many Americans as possible to share the burden of our troops. Our military is the strongest when it pulls into its ranks Americans from all races, creeds and colors and especially all walks of life. It is important for Members of this House, where the Constitution places the power to declare war, to also serve alongside our troops.

I voted for the deployment of troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, and was honored then to be one of the first to join them in Afghanistan.

As a Naval Reserve Intelligence Officer, I deployed to Southern Afghanistan in support of NATO's International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF at the headquarters of Regional Command South. I served in the command of a Dutch Major General, Mart de Kruif, and on the staff of his American Deputy for Stabilization, Brigadier General John Nicholson of the U.S. Army.

I can report to the House that the morale of our troops in Afghanistan is high. Americans that I joined feel that this is the right mission in the right place. Just because this effort is 10 times harder than we first thought, it remains the place where we can best support the safety of the American people.

Our headquarters was located at Kandahar Airfield, known as KAF. We located just a few miles from Tarnak Farms, where Osama bin Laden had trained many al Qaeda operatives. A few miles further down the road was the palace of Mullah Omar, the murderous former dictator of the Taliban.

We face some real challenges in Afghanistan. Our mission has now stretched for 7 years, and can wear thin with the Afghan people. As we look at Senator Barack Obama becoming our Commander-in-Chief, it's important that we review what we have accomplished in Afghanistan, its differences from the Iraq mission and what remains to be done.

First, it's important to note that Afghanistan is not Iraq, and almost every comparison between the two leads to people making errors with regard to our policy in Afghanistan. While both countries are predominantly Muslim, with over 25 million people, there is where the similarities end.

Iraq is a country that has always had a strong central government. Afghanistan has always had a certain amount of lawlessness, even during the Soviet dictatorship.